

Infectious diseases: Why moms-to-be need vaccines during pregnancy

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Vaccines are a part of many well-child visits. But they also should be part of the care moms-to-be receive to protect their unborn children. "When we take care of pregnant patients, we're really taking care of two patients: mom and baby. We know that pregnant women are more susceptible to, and can get more ill from, certain illnesses, so it's

important for moms-to-be to understand why certain immunizations are so important," says Dr. Tina Ardon, a Mayo Clinic family medicine physician.

A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that many [pregnant women](#) are not receiving vaccines for the flu and whooping cough. The lack of protection can have significant consequences for moms-to-be and their unborn children, says Ardon. "Pregnant patients are at greater risk for hospitalization from influenza infections and have a higher rate of complications," she says. The [flu vaccine](#) is recommended during any trimester for a woman who is pregnant during flu season. Whooping cough is a highly contagious—and preventable respiratory illness, a hallmark of which is a severe cough that leaves a person gasping for air. Also known as pertussis, after the bacteria that cause the infection, the cough can last several weeks to months.

"Infants and [younger children](#) are at the highest risk for complications associated with pertussis, including apnea, pneumonia and, at worse, death," says Ardon. She adds that nearly half of all babies under 1 in the U.S. who have pertussis end up being treated in the hospital. Complications are most serious for babies under 6 months.

"Vaccinating our moms-to-be gives the mom a chance to pass on antibodies to her baby to protect against pertussis even before birth. "Typically, infants and children get five doses of the vaccine between the ages of 2 months and 6 years, a booster around 11 or 12 years, and then one more booster as an adult. Pregnant women should get a booster during every pregnancy in the earliest part of the third trimester. Ardon recommends that expectant moms talk to their [health care provider](#) if they have questions.

"It is important for all adults, as well as [older children](#), including

adolescents, to be vaccinated, so we can help protect though smallest patients," says Ardon.

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